



## ***The Bravery of Seeking Help***

*Researching how college can have a negative impact on the students mental health and well-being*

By

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Media Communications, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

Anxiety, depression, suicide, stigma; all these are words that are associated with the term mental health. As society is finally making progress in addressing the importance of positive mental health the numbers of people it affects each year is still at an all time high.

This dissertation aims to accompany a radio documentary on mental health, targeting college students. Mental health has become a much larger talking point in Ireland over the past years and now programmes, documentaries and publications are addressing the topic more than ever. With almost 300,000 of the Irish population aged between 20-24, according to the Central Statistics Office (2011), it is important to reach out to this age group and talk about how mental health affects them. There will also be discussion on how the approach to mental health in college has changed in Ireland over the years.

Given that there is a variety of factors that could contribute to a person's well being in college, it is vital to examine what exactly these factors are and why they have such an influence on a college students mental health by talking to the students themselves and the people who know how to help them. The reader will find an examination on a compilation of contributors to mental health in college and discussion of why it is important to talk about this sensitive topic.

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Andrea Wright,  
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## Chapter 1 : Introduction

*“Mental health among college students represents not only a growing concern but also an opportunity, because of the large number of people who could be reached during an important period of life.”*

*- Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010.*

This radio documentary is aimed to inform listeners that college is a place where a person's mental health can be affected negatively and therefore impact their college experience.

The documentary itself has been divided into three themes in order to properly explore the topic. The themes were chosen on the basis of how important they came across in each interview and through the research maintained throughout this project. The themes are stigma, available services and personal experience. These three topics were noted as consistent talking points during the interview process. The content featured in the documentary comes from a range of different speakers who have experience with mental health and the influence it has had on third level students; A counsellor, mental health officer, clinical specialist and also two students. There is also a narrative featured during the documentary which is used as an aid to give context and a link from one theme to the other. The concept of this documentary has changed over the course of the process and is not the same as the one that was originally proposed. This is due to difficulties that appeared and advice that was given and then taken on board. The original idea focused on the students personal experiences with mental health in college but later shifted to the professionals and their views on the importance of tackling this subject in third level colleges across Ireland. Because of this change in focus, there was a lot more information gathered about how serious this problem is which made for an appealing documentary.

This documentary drives home the fact that recently more and more college students are actually reporting mental health which is a huge improvement. The professionals within this documentary place a certain spotlight on this idea of talking and opening up as the best way to get help and combat the stigma, “Ahead — the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability — reported a jump from 343 to 501 in the number of new students who made themselves known to disability services as having a mental health condition. However, it said, this 46% rise came as no surprise” (Irish Examiner, 2018). This is a huge improvement and means that students are heading in the right direction and becoming more aware of the support services in the colleges and actually making use of them. The idea of reaching out to young adults during this period in their life when they are making such huge changes and are more vulnerable has become a high priority for Ireland advised by the World Health Organisation. This was explained by Treasa Hanniffy whose voice will be heard in the radio documentary where she explains about ‘Happy Universities’.

There is a certain structure that can be noted in this audio documentary. It will start off with a focus on the professionals and any important information they have to offer in an effort to show the listeners just how serious mental health is in our colleges. Starting off with a fact like, “Ireland is ranked fourth in Europe for highest rates of suicide” (Please Talk, 2018) , although sad, should definitely surprise a lot of people and peak their interest. These statistics are more prominent due to the rise in suicides among adolescents which includes those aged 17-19 which are the ages that many teenagers start their first year in college, “UNICEF’s latest Report Card serves as a wake-up call for Ireland. Despite economic recovery and the idea that the consequent rising tide will benefit everyone, it is clear children are experiencing real and substantial inequality and we risk leaving them behind. Services are inadequate in several areas and policy change is badly needed”, ( Peter Powell, 2017).

This whole subject and idea stemmed from my own personal experience with college and how it impacted my own mental health in a negative way. Fortunately I was brought up with the knowledge of how important it is to take care of your mental well-being and that it is nothing to be ashamed of. Not everyone is that lucky and that is where the curiosity started to appear; how did others who were attending third level in college in Ireland struggle or cope with the effect it

had on their mental health and how can this be tackled. To an extent this documentary could be viewed as a personal journey or discovery but the main focus is on the issues at hand and what we, as a country, should be doing to deal with helping our young adults and college students overcome the fear of talking about how they are feeling; this is especially concerning to young males who, although do not experience psychiatric issues as much as females, tend to keep it to themselves resulting in a much larger suicide rate among young males, “The National Suicide Research Foundation’s Annual Report shows that overall, 375 males and 76 females had died by suicide in 2015. Rates of male suicide stayed much higher than female rates across all age brackets – the group with the highest rate of suicide were males aged 25-34 and 45-54. Although the report showed that rates of suicide are falling steadily year-on-year – the rate of suicide amongst the 25-34 age bracket for 2015 has increased compared to 2014,” (thejournal.ie, 2016).

With all of this information in mind, it is easy to understand why this subject was deemed important enough to produce a radio documentary on it. The statistics speak for themselves. The following document will also cover many aspects of the documentary process. These aspects will include the research that was undertaken in order to get a better sense of the subject and also what products have been previously produced; if there has been any. The next section and also the third chapter will include more information about the methodology and editing process of the thesis. This is more based on the technical side of the product and how it came to the end result. The final chapter, excluding the conclusion, focuses on my own evaluation and thoughts of the overall product, process and experience. Here will be discussed any problems that arose, ideas that could have been done differently or any changes that could have been made in general. There will also be some explanation about the learning outcomes achieved from writing and producing this dissertation.



## Chapter 2 : Evidence of Research

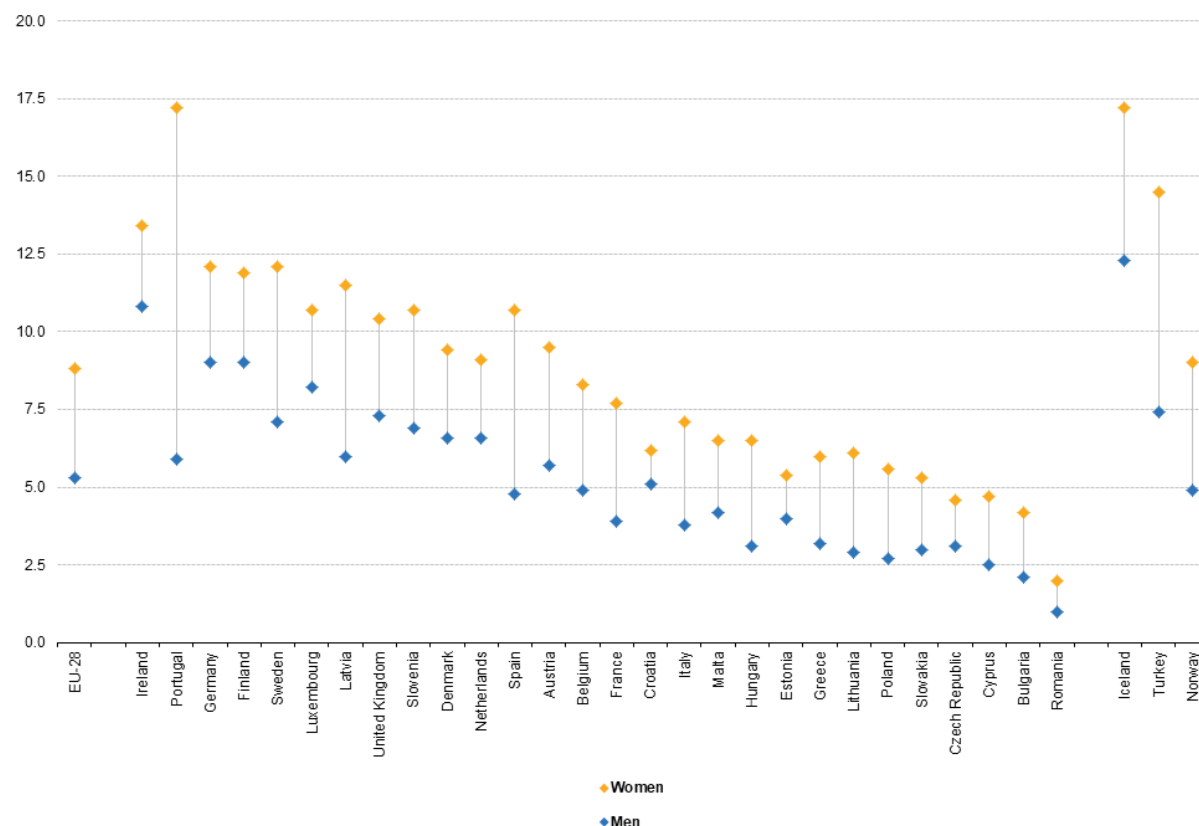
The following chapter is a present of all the research conducted in order to make this project a success. This research was done by using academic papers and journals, other documentary work, online newspaper articles which all relate to this project either by content or production.

The research will be explained under a number of headings associated with the project:

Contributing Factors, Stigma, and Relevance of the Topic. These headings have been changed and used in accordance to the research, general project idea and interview content. One thing that did become evident through the research is that the attitude had towards mental health in Ireland needs to change in order for their to be an improvement, “Approximately half (52%) have had some experience of people with mental health problems. These experiences are most likely through friendship (36%), with approximately a fifth having experience through work, neighbourhood or living with someone (22%, 20% and 18% respectively)”, (Healthy Ireland Survey, 2016). This survey proves that although many of us have come into contact with mental health at some point, how it is handled or addressed is still a huge issue. Recently there are more courses in Ireland that are aimed at training people how to be aware if someone might be suffering from a mental health issue and how to approach the subject with them, especially if a person could be suicidal, “esuicideTALK is a one to two hour exploration in suicide awareness. The programme is organised around the question “*should we talk about suicide?*” and offers a space to safely explore some of the more challenging issues relating to suicide. The programme encourages everyone to find a part they can play in preventing suicide”, (HSE.ie).

There are many articles, documentaries and research papers where the prime subject is mental health. Some of these are student based where others are more general. As this is such a broad subject due to the many different areas and perceptions of mental health it is rare to find research that is the exact same angle as the one being used for this project. From own personal research there has been many studies on a wide range of factors that are examined to see how they impact a person’s mental wellbeing with respect to college students. Examples of these are gender, year of study and living situations. With the following research I was able to grasp a better understanding of how a college students circumstances play a vital role in their experience in

terms of their financial situation and gender as examples. In 2016, a survey conducted by Healthy Ireland found that there were higher levels of psychological distress among women in Ireland than of men. The survey conducted this study over group of men and women of varying ages and it came to the conclusion when it comes to a negative mental health experience women always came in at a higher percentage than men; including the ages 15-24 where the difference was very prominent with 8% of males in this age group who had experienced negative mental health as opposed to women who came in a 17%, ( Healthy Ireland Survey, 2016). Back in 2014, it became adamant that not only were Ireland up at the top for rates of depression in Europe but it was also women who were suffering the most according to the chart featured below:



Note: ranked on the share of the total population reporting that they had chronic depression.  
Source: Eurostat (online data code: hlth\_ehis\_cd1e)

**Fig 1. Source: eurostat, 2014**

## Contributing Factors:

According to various articles and academic journals, there are many factors that can contribute to mental health in college. Gender can be one of these factors according to the 'Journal of Adolescent Health' which states that women in college are more likely to develop forms of depression and anxiety but men have a higher suicide rate, (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2006) . This article is based on teenagers, many of which can qualify as college students. A questionnaire carried out by the researchers showed that "More girls than boys turned to a friend for help for an emotional concern, whereas more boys turned to a family member first. Boys had less mental health knowledge and experience and higher mental health stigma than girls" (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2006) . This means that it was deemed less acceptable for the boys to seek help and open up about their feelings because this has always been the norm. This information supplies a clearer understanding of the differences between males and females when confronted about their mental health. The 'American Journal of Medicine' found similar results to the one above when they assessed one thousand patients, with 559 of those being women, and it showed that "In the 1,000 patients of the PRIME-MD study, mood, anxiety, and somatoform disorders and psychiatric comorbidity were all significantly more common in women than men," (Linzer, 1996) . This research took into account that all participants were primary care patients.

Finances and living situation can be a factor at any age and can have an influence on whether a person's college experience is a positive one or not. College is a financially difficult time for students. A study carried out in a college in Guam about the predictors of mental health among college students showed "In other words, students with no financial or emotional support from their family were more likely than students with such support to have higher levels of anxiety symptoms" (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2016). The 'American Journal of Orthopsychiatry' used the idea of money and the students living arrangements during the college term as a factor to test for rates of depression and anxiety. Students coming from poorer families or experiencing more financial struggles were encountering higher levels of stress and anxiety than those who came from more comfortable financial situations and well off families. This research made the point that students who still lived at home with parents or guardians seemed to have more suicidal thoughts. This is suspected to be due to lack of independence and social life according to the journal. Both of these are hugely important for students to grow and progress in adulthood. (Journal of Child and Family Studies, 2016).

There are certain times in college that will be more difficult than others. It can differ from year to year. Socially, first year will be the most difficult as it is a completely new experience and one that has to be conquered alone, essentially. On the other hand, final year is the toughest by means of academic pressure. The Journal of Child and Family Studies developed a research into first year college students in particular and how their mental health is affected. In this research they took the topic of bullying in childhood into account to try and see whether or not this had a part to play in depression levels in the first year of college, (Reid, 2016). From the results they gathered they discovered that first years who had been subject to childhood bullying felt more depressed than those didn't. The students took two of the same surveys over the course of the year. One in the Fall soon after college had started and one in the Spring nearing the end of the academic year. It showed that depression and anxiety levels had started to drop slowly as the year progressed. But previously bullied students still had a higher level in both semesters.

### **Stigma:**

In February of this year, the Irish Times wrote an article about the increase of college students reporting negative mental health issues. Although it is unfortunate that this is happening it does prove that there has been a reduction in stigma in colleges around Ireland if more people are coming forward and opening up to someone about this issue. The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability, said "a 46 per cent rise in the number of students with mental health conditions in the last academic year was most likely linked to improved supports and reduced stigma," (The Irish Times, 2018). From this, it is clear that the stigma seems to be improving because these students are feeling more confident in being open about it and seeking help but this does not mean the stigma is non-existent still, according to the Please Talk website who have informed students that, "Stigma has its roots in fear and misunderstanding. Many people hold negative opinions towards people with mental health problems because they do not understand the issues involved and because they are relying on myths and misconceptions. As a result, many young people find it hard to admit they are struggling to cope and to reach out for support as they are afraid that their peers or loved ones will not understand or will mock them.

"Your attitude towards mental health can have a real impact on the people around you." (Please

Talk, 2017). This is a straightforward way of effectively explaining the problems surrounding stigma and mental health in Irish colleges. Despite not always being able to show its existence, this does not prevent the stigmatization of it from existing. Goffman suggested that cues which signal stigma may not be readily apparent; he illustrated this point by distinguishing discredited from discreditable kinds of stigma, (Goffman, 1963). Examples of the discredited group include persons from a cultural minority with an apparent physical trait that leads them to believe that their differentness is obvious to the public, for example, Africans have dark skin. Persons with discreditable stigma, on the other hand, can hide their condition; they have no readily manifest mark that identifies them as part of a stigmatized group. “The public cannot determine whether persons are mentally ill by looking at them. Citizens must infer mental illness from four signals: labels, psychiatric symptoms, social skills deficits, and physical appearance” (Penn & Martin, 1998). According to labeling theory, persons who are called mentally ill, or are otherwise known to have such a label (e.g., being observed coming out of a psychiatrist’s office), are the object of stigma and discrimination (Link, 1987; Scheff, 1974).

When researching the effects of a stigma associated in mental health, it is important to look into what it was and how far it has come. “The stigma of psychiatric illness is a negative factor in its presentation, detection and treatment,” (Peter Byrne, 1997). Stigma surrounding mental health has always existed, up until recent generations who now accept that having a mental illness is okay and nothing to be ashamed of. “The label of mental illness changes the perceptions of observers even in the absence of abnormal behaviour,” (Piner & Kahle, 1984). Here it can be seen that this topic was being addressed and discussed, just as it still has to be now; thirty-four years later.

Taking it one step farther, stigma and suicide are terms that must be addressed together because one normally causes the other. The better example of this is young males who, due to their gender, have always found it less socially acceptable to discuss how they feel, if they cannot talk about it and seek help then they are going to suffer for longer and will be more likely to turn to suicide as an outlet for their pain. This is best explained in The British Journal of Psychiatry where they explain that “not only does the stigmatization of mental illness prevent people from seeking treatment, which in turn exposes them to a greater risk of suicide, but also suicide can

appear to be the best solution for a stigmatized individual”,(Pompili, 2003). Stigmatization can be defined as “ the assignment of negative perceptions to an individual because of perceived difference from the population at large; it may occur on the basis of physical appearance (including race or sex), of mental or physical illness, or of various other qualities,” ( Miller-Keane Encyclopedia, 2003). A simple way of putting this statement is that if the stigmatization of mental illness is not decreased then sufferers are at a higher risk of attempting suicide and this in turn increases the stigma surrounding suicide. The acceptance of the illness can decrease the chance of someone turning to suicide as an outlet.

### **Topic Relevance:**

There are a variety of researches and documentaries already out there such as Who Cares? Which was produced by Patrick O’ Gorman and focuses on the mental health care in Ireland’s local communities, (RTE, 1987), on this type of subject but they are from a variety of different outlooks,focusing on various angles surrounding mental health in Ireland as well as some in the college environment. As this is a radio documentary based thesis, it was essential to research other documentaries of a similar subject.

In April of this year, RTE released a television documentary called, ‘The Big Picture: Young and Troubled’. This documentary focused on mental health among the younger generation of Ireland and the day to day pressures that they experience, (RTE, 2018). The aim of this project was to really drive home the issue that people in Ireland who are suffering with mental health illnesses are being failed by the system, (Earley, 2018). There is some similarity with this documentary and the one proposed in this thesis, for example both have a focus on the younger population; one being school children the other young adults in college. This documentary also goes further to look into Ireland's mental health services and how they are not doing enough. Unlike the proposed radio documentary featured in this document, ‘Young and Trouble’ went further by talking to a couple who had lost their 11 year old daughter to suicide and the reason they gave was that they did not get the help that they needed.

Another Irish documentary that focuses on mental health is ‘What Stigma?’ by filmmaker James Keating. The documentary started out as a project for college but eventually became more when

it was shown at Clones Film Festival and the London Underground Festival. “There is a fear of it. You can’t see it, like a broken arm, and therefore you’re not really quite sure how it works or what it means. People think that if you talk about depression, you’re somehow not like them, hey think that maybe you’ll go off the handle or you shouldn’t be left alone with sharp knives. I think it is a learned behaviour. As you’re growing up and people around you tell you, ‘Keep that quiet, don’t discuss that openly, it could impact your job prospects so be careful to hold the story of any mental health difficulty that you have close to your heart and don’t speak about it,” (O’ Carroll, 2013). The aim of this particular documentary is to try and assist in lowering the stigmatization surrounding mental health.

## Chapter 3 : Construction & Design of Product

The idea behind the product concept was to produce a 20 minute audio documentary that would be suitable for radio. Radio documentary is still an important part of journalism and how research is conducted, “The exercise of highlighting and documenting from real life the methodology of radio documentary production contributes to the increasing body of academic work dedicated to exploring journalism as research,” (Lindgren, 2011). The majority of this documentary will consist of interviews with professionals who are working in and for the industry of mental health care and promotion. Some of the audio content will also feature students and their experience with mental health during their time in third level education. The documentary will be divided into themes which stem from the factors that are associated with mental health well-being. These themes will be the following: Stigma, services, personal experience and why there is still need for improvement. As this topic is quite serious it was important to end the documentary off on a more positive note; how mental health has been met with many improvements in recent years.

In order to give the reader a full understanding of the topic I must first discuss my involvement in the topic and why I chose to focus my thesis on this. The subject of mental health was always a very open subject growing up with my dad being a psychiatric nurse and currently a clinical specialist in mental health; which is why he features lightly in this documentary on the approval of my radio supervisor. As well as this, I unknowingly grew up with anxiety and college was the place where I discovered what it was and how serious it could be. I was lucky enough to have a parent who understood that our mental health is just as important as our physical health. As the years progressed I witnessed first hand the negative effects college can have on young adults mental health which lead to my curiosity on the matter being provoked and the decision to focus this thesis on these effects.

From this, it was important to have interviewees that were specialised in the field of mental health and wellbeing, especially concerning those aged 18-25 which is the more likely ages of those attended third level colleges. I got in contact with many organisations around Ireland and



although many were unable to help me, that wasn't the case for all. By the time the editing progress had begun, there were five interviews in total to be included in this documentary; three of these were interviews from mental health practitioners and mental well-being organisations and the other two were former and current college students in Ireland. There was one interviewee that stood out in this documentary as her work focused on the mental health of students in Irish colleges; exactly what was needed for the purpose of this audio piece. This was the National Officer for Please Talk, Treasa Hanniffy.

### **Treasa Hanniffy**

Treasa has been involved in the promotion of mental health for many years, beginning her career with Mental Health Ireland and now Please Talk. She also works as a life coach. Her main job at Please Talk is to support and coordinate the mental health campaign in colleges across Ireland which are led by the students. The main aim of these campaigns is to encourage students to talk about how they are feeling and inform them about the services that are available to each individual college. Please Talk is a platform for students to share their own experiences with mental health in college in the hope of it helping others who are possibly in the same position. The organisations slogan is that "Talking is a sign of strength".

I was able to organise this interview when I contacted Headline, the national media monitoring programme for mental health and suicide in Ireland. When I explained to them my topic and what I was looking for they put me in touch with Treasa who was more than happy to assist me as she is obviously a big advocate of mental health and encourages any involvement in the awareness of it. We agreed to meet in the Meyrick hotel, Galway where I carried the interview using Zoom H1. I was looking forward to meeting Treasa and interviewing her and when I heard her talk about the importance of talking about mental health in college with such passion and understanding I knew she would be perfect for the documentary.

Treasa was able to provide a lot of information regarding mental well being and just how valuable it is to start approaching the subject in college. She talked about most of the subjects being addressed in the documentary such as stigma, services and also what could contribute to someone having a negative mental health experience while studying in third level education. The

whole interview was relaxed and informative and the sound quality was good. Because the interview took place in a hotel reception area at times there were noise disruptions from time to time but the interview was long enough that there was a lot of recorded material where there was not a problem also. Unfortunately, It was only when listening to the audio on the editing software that the low playing piano music became audible. This was not idea but a minor issue that was able to be solved.

### **Patricia Murphy**

The next interview took place in the home of Patricia Murphy, a volunteer counsellor based in Dublin. Although the only age limitations for her work is that the clients are to be over eighteen, she informed me that the majority of her clients are in fact ranging from ages 18-25; this was ideal because it covers the average age of those who could be attending college in Ireland. Patricia was able to provide an insight into the mental health struggles that young adults come to her with. The interview with Patricia was more emotional that the previous because her information was on the basis of real people that she has encountered in her work as a counsellor including the heart-breaking conclusion that too many people in Ireland are still accepting suicide as an alternative coping mechanism because they are not getting the help that they need in this country. This interview was very eye opening and the hope is that resonates in the documentary. The audio for this interview was very clear because it took place in a private and controlled environment where there were no disruptions.

### **Gregg Wright**

I was in two minds about including this one in the documentary but after discussions with my supervisor, we decided that it would be good. Although I was able to get into contact with many people working in the mental health sector in Ireland, most of them were unable to interview. Gregg right has been an avid mental health practitioner for well over twenty years; he is also my dad. After much consideration, the interview was carried out and the end result was professional but also took into consideration a parents point of view. Since this documentary is one of curiosity and personal experience it does fit in well. He won't be featured heavily in the documentary but just enough to break up the two female voices from time to time; it was important to have a gender balance in the documentary and every professional I made contact

with was female. This was my way of combating the possibility of a single gender documentary. Gregg has worked with people of all ages through the years but admits in his interview that too many of his patients have been college students who just “Cannot handle the pressure of college”. This interview took place in the home of Gregg where the noise could be controlled but there were some background noises that could only be discovered when the audio was listened to on the editing software.

### **Gillian Chapman**

Gillian was the first student that was interviewed for the project. After having a regrettable college experience while obtaining her degree she has a good understanding of how others might feel. She explained in the interview how and why her experience in college was such a negative one and what she reckons could be changed to make the transition into college easier because despite being considered an adult, it is a huge change going from secondary school to third level education so suddenly. Gillian was a great interviewee as she had a lot of ideas and opinions and was great at talking. Because the topic is one that a lot of people might not be comfortable with being recorded I focused the subject on the professionals with the suggestion of one of my supervisors; this has benefited greatly as they know what they are talking about and how to talk about it. With this in mind I still managed to get some recordings off two students; one male and one female. Gillian was the female. Gillian is from Dublin and also attended college there so her views were different to the other who was a male that attended college in Galway. Although the student interviews took place separately, the editing process was done in a way that made it seem like they were almost having a conversation or reacting to each others statements. This added an element of colloquialism to the documentary. Once again this interview took place in Gillian’s home where the sound environment could be controlled and kept to a minimum.

### **Jack Grier**

Jack is the male student who I interviewed to go alongside Gillian. Once again, a controlled audio environment was used here. This point of view was important in this documentary, not just for a gender balance but because from research and details given by the professionals in their interviews, young males suffer in college a lot because they will not talk to anyone about how

they are feeling; there is a huge stigma surrounding mental health in Ireland but it is even more prominent for the male population. This interview gave the documentary an understanding of how males, especially those in college, suffer from feeling like they have to “bottle everything up”, just like Jack explains. Jack’s interview focused on this idea of young males who have a hard time and don’t talk to their friends or family; this has been a huge problem in Ireland where it’s not news that although females are more likely to become depressed they are more open about it, this then leads to a higher number of young men committing to suicide because they cannot open up about it.

### **Music and Sound Effects**

When the idea of this thesis topic started coming together, music and sound effects was always going to be a difficult area. Because of the content, it was important that neither of these took away from the speakers and what they were saying. In the end I did not use any added sound effects in the documentary because they would have not been suitable. The words should be enough and not need these extra sound effects to gauge interest; the documentary should sound more natural.

As for music, this was also a difficult but necessary choice. Before the decision on the music was made, it ended up happening anyway. Previously explained in this chapter, the interview with Treasa Hanniffy from Please Talk was carried out in a hotel reception where there was subtle piano music playing. Although the music is extremely quiet it still exists. Initially it was going to be complemented with other piano music in the background to make it sound as one but this would have meant finding something very similar and in the same key. Upon further listening and consideration it was decided that the piano music was quiet enough to be easily covered up. In the documentary music called Romantic Flight composed by John Powell was used as it was soft and simple; this was perfect as using something more sorrowful would have dulled down the overall atmosphere of the audio. As an added solution, the narration also explained that Treasa was met and interviewed in a hotel reception therefore letting the listeners know beforehand that there might be some added noise in the background when all the others have silence.

The majority of the music that is featured in the piece is kept at a low volume underneath the

speaking content only to rise in volume between interview segments. It was crucial that the music did not rise above the speakers or take away from the content at any point. The music was low and a way to compliment the speaking when necessary.

### **Scripting an Narration**

The scripting and narration was carried out at the end so it could be worked into the rest of the radio documentary. The same recording device was used for this and all other interviews used. The narration was an important part of this documentary because it was able to give the audience some context as to what they were going to be hearing and also as a way to lead each section into the other. The narration was used in the introduction and the conclusion and was recorded using my own voice as this is a documentary of personal experience and discovery. The narration was also used to introduce the interviewees so it would be obvious who each of them were and why they were speaking. An important part of the scripting in this project was the content warning at the beginning of the audio and also the helplines once it had ended. These are a must in anything that could possibly be unsettling for a listener and result in a trigger.

### **Editing Process**

Like any project there are always obstacles that can appear midway through the editing process. An example of this here would be the piano music having to be used in the final piece. The majority of the interviews seemed to go well without little or no problems, especially audio. Because of complications with the editing software, there was a few days of inactivity. Audacity was being used early into the project but it came with complications and the loss of some of the edited pieces. Thankfully the original audio still existed elsewhere and after that the process was continued on Cool Edit. This was a lot simpler to use and much more reliable. There were no problems using this software.

The interviews were all edited into various segments initially and then later placed into the multi track. By doing so it made it easier to organise the placement of each theme and section without too much issues if it did need to be changed at any point. After these were placed in the final order, narration and music was then added.

## **Ethics**

No journalistic project is without its ethical values. This subject in particular because it was focusing on mental health and well-being. This being said, ethics is not necessarily always formal. In this piece the interviewees were discussing a serious subject that affects many people so they needed to be comfortable and at ease. A way of doing this is to talk and get to know the person rather than diving straight into the recording which can be unnerving to some people. It was imperative to make sure they knew the topic and double check on the day of the interview that they are still okay to talk. Small things make a difference in terms of ethics like announcing to the person that you are pressing record so they know exactly when they are being recorded. The best way to avoid any ethical issues is to get each interviewee to sign a consent form so that if anything does happen there should not be any major problems.

## Chapter 4 : Discussion

This chapter takes a look back at the process and evaluates all the steps that were made in order to produce a successful radio documentary based on the topic of mental health and wellbeing in third level education. This section of the thesis will look at evaluating various aspects of the documentary process including supervisors, difficulties, changes and more. Choosing the thesis topic was a lot more difficult than I was initially expecting because it could basically be based on anything. I had a few ideas as the college year progressed and I settled on the one discussed in this document because it was the one that I felt passionate about and genuinely interested in learning more about the subject and find out more from the people who have dedicated themselves to support and promote mental health everyday.

One of my biggest concerns when I started this documentary process was that it would be a topic that has been completely overdone. There has been a lot of research conducted on mental health both in and out of Ireland but there was not as much based in Ireland as I was expecting. That came as a surprise but I was confident then that the lack of previous documentaries meant that there was a gap for this topic and none that I did find focused solely on the college experience. There is also many organisations that have been set up in Ireland in the past years which I contacted such as Pieta House, Headline, ALustForLife, Reach Out and many more. Having so many of these platforms and organisations focusing on the mental well being of Ireland meant that it was still an important topic to talk about. Unfortunately most of the academic research came from different countries, especially America so I had to rely a lot on websites and news articles for information in Ireland.

The final thesis proposal was submitted on the 7th March, 2018. This document would be examined and once this was complete I would be informed of my dissertation supervisors who would assist and guide me through this process that took place over the course of summer, 2018. About two to three weeks after the proposal was submitted I received an email regarding my thesis supervisors who were Francesca Lawlor and Barry Finnegan. I corresponded with both soon after receiving this information and then set up meetings to discuss my project in person. I

first met with Barry where we discussed what I was hoping to aim with this product as well as helping me view the topic from various angles so I could really understand what I was hoping to achieve in the end result. I then met with Francesca who discussed the technical side of the documentary with me in terms of themes, structure and any ideas she had that could make it work in a way that I myself might not have noticed.

After these meetings I corresponded with these supervisors through email and on the phone. I also had technical sessions with Pat Proctor where he assisted me with the editing software and the beginning of putting the content together as well as any editing difficulties I might have encountered at that stage. During one of these technical sessions I also met again with Francesca so she could listen to some of my audio content to make sure it was of good quality and discussed other aspects that I started to consider such as music and format of the product. All of these various meetings and sessions were extremely helpful and necessary in order to produce a good quality radio documentary. The advice and guidance benefited greatly in making sure nothing was left to chance and also valuable to have someone who are experts in their field to look at your work from a perspective that I, myself might not be able to.

There are somethings that I would have changed or do differently if I was to produce this thesis again. Probably the biggest mistake was not being organised enough in my planning from the very start in terms of knowing exactly when I wanted interviews started and finished by, planning how and when I was going to start each chapter of the written section and the radio so they were both being dealt with equally. It all worked out but If I had been more strict with my organisation earlier on then it would have been a lot more simpler because I would know what I was to do each day.

I would have taken more advantage of contacting my supervisors rather than the odd email here and there. If I had done so they would have helped keeping me on top of things which is right back to organisation. The supervisors were there to help and I rather than feeling that I shouldn't need to rely on them as much I should have just contacted them when necessary. Thankfully this improved coming nearer the end of the process and their feedback was welcomed.



When I first started this idea for my dissertation I wanted to focus on students, both past and present, and their personal experiences with mental health struggles in college in Ireland. Though the idea was a good one it just wasn't attainable. I was unaware of this until my supervisor, Barry, pointed out some problems I may face and it was only then I realised how much I could struggle to obtain interviews if I stayed with that angle. He told me to consider focusing on the professional aspect of mental health in Ireland and I think by doing this the documentary went a lot smoother than it could have been. I still managed to include some personal experience within the product but it is not the main focus. Because of these changes the title was constantly changing and also because the angle was always changing or a new one was being discovered. It was only near the end when I had all the content and a structure for the documentary that I was able to select an appropriate title for the product and dissertation.

I noticed that the interviews became more natural and somewhat easier as they went on. This is no surprise as with each person I talked to I grew that slight bit more confident in what I was doing. This is obvious with the length of each audio recording because the later they were, the longer they seemed to be as I got to a point where I didn't need to rely on such strict questions as much and could pick up on things being said mid interview. Interviewing is a skill that develops over time and If I was to produce another radio documentary I would feel much more confident in what I was doing. I did manage to end up with plenty of content without having too much to edit and the volumes seemed good or as close to good as possible which helped in the editing process as I did not have to amplify volumes much throughout so each voice is on the same volume level.

## Conclusion:

This project started out as one that I was hoping would appeal to the emotions of the listeners and now it has become more than that. This radio documentary provides knowledge which I too only attained through my research and interviews, that Ireland still has a long way to go in terms of mental health. It was through this experience that it also became adamant there was a sure difference between having a mental health illness and looking after your mental health well being. The more research that was done, the more adamant it became that no one knows the answers to why some people have a negative mental health experience while others can cope a lot better; but it is evident that there is help out there and through this thesis process I got the chance to meet some of the people who are trying to help. Although the thoughts I had about the subject direction at the beginning of the college year and where it actually ended are quite different I wouldn't change it because that is where it needed to go.

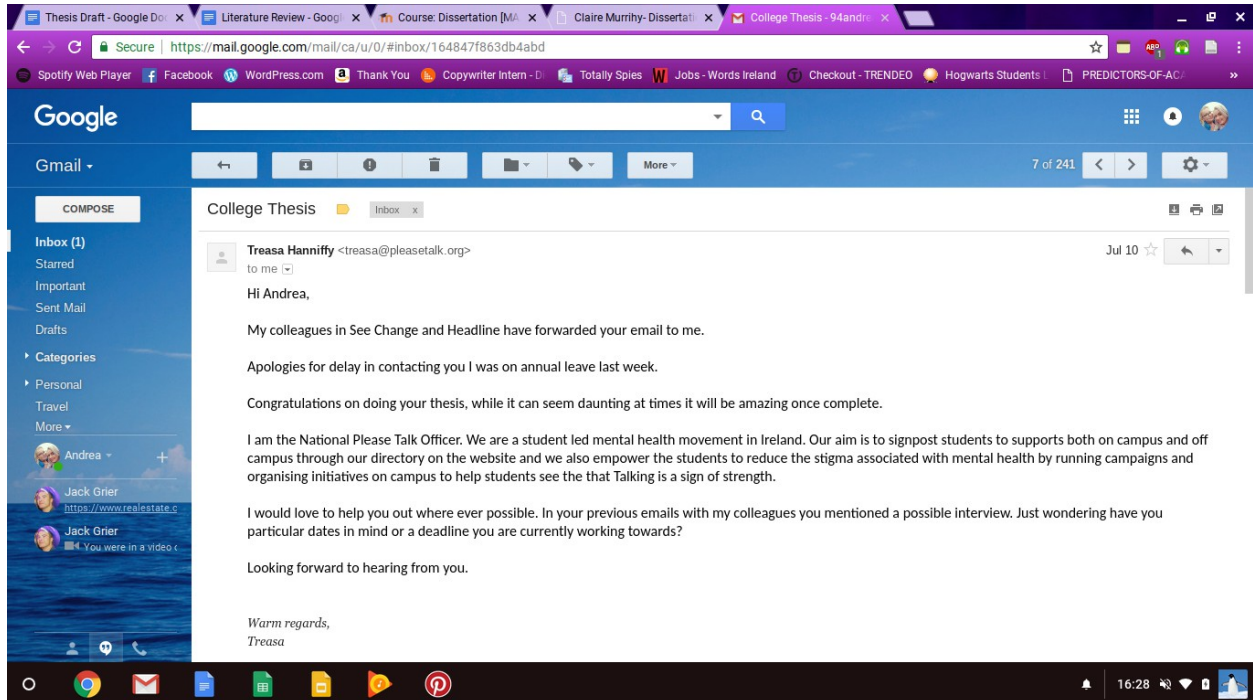
This documentary has become a platform of information regarding mental health in Ireland and what needs to be done about it. It also serves the purpose of being a place to encourage those who might be suffering to seek help or reach out. The main aim of this documentary was that it could act as a product of relatable content; where once person might benefit from it and then it has served its purpose because mental health is real and it is important that people know it is also normal; it can affect anybody. The most important thing to take from this is that yes, a stigma still exists around mental health and it needs to be broken down; the best way to do this is to try and open up and know that you will not be judged for possibly being depressed, anxious, suicidal or stressed. Like Treasa suggests in the documentary, Ireland has one of the highest attendances for college so if such a big population exists here then this is where we should be placing a focus on improving mental health. "Mental Health Ireland (MHI), a national voluntary organization, aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support people with a mental illness, their families and carers by identifying their needs and advocating their rights (MHI, 2000). MHI has identified the importance of developing a range of strategies to increase public awareness and change public attitudes towards the understanding of mental illness. MHI also recognizes the importance of promoting positive mental health (MHI, 2000). Positive mental health promotion

focuses on different levels of society, at different stages of the life span and in different life settings. Adolescents and young people are a prioritized group and MHI operates a number of mental health programmes with young people,” (Mental Health Ireland, 2004).

The topic of mental health in Ireland still has a long way to go but if a documentary such as this can encourage people to try and get help or even not judge others then it is one step closer to breaking down the stigma. By focusing on college students we can not only learn what might be affecting them but pointing them in the direction of those who can help them professionally and therefore show them the coping skills to help them later on in life.

# Appendixes

## Appendix A : Sample Email Correspondence with possible Interviewee



## **Appendix B : Sample Interview Questions**

- Could you give me some information on the impact mental health has had on the population of Ireland? (Just some average facts/figures/percentages to give people an idea how important and serious this topic is)
- How important is it that we address the fact that college can act as a place where mental health issues are developed?
- Where do you think these issues stem from? (Stress, pressure, gender, age, course, living situation etc).
- Why do you think a stigma still exists for third level students talking about mental health? How can we combat this stigma?
- What is the best way/advice you can give to a student who is/might be dealing with mental health issues?

## **Appendix C : List of Interviewees**

- Treasa Hanniffy - National Officer, Please Talk.org
- Patricia Murphy - Volunteer Mental Health Counsellor
- Gregg Wright - Healthcare Practitioner and Clinical Specialist
- Gillian Chapman - Current College Student
- Jack Grier - College Alumnus

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